



# E-Worship 4:23

An online resource for officers and worship leaders in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

"A time is coming...when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks." - John 4:23

## Was Jesus Born in a Tower?

**Did you know that Jesus may not have been born in a stable, or even in a cave, but rather in a tower?**

The tower is actually mentioned in two scripture passages: Genesis 35:19-21, and Micah 4:8. *"And Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem... and Israel journeyed, and spread his tent beyond the tower of Edar."* *"As for you, O watchtower of the flock, O stronghold of the Daughter of Zion, the former dominion will be restored to you: kingship will come to the Daughter of Jerusalem."*

The tower was known in Hebrew as "Migdal Edar", which literally translated, means "the tower of the flock". It was a real tower, probably located just north of Bethlehem on the road that leads to the city of Jerusalem†. According to Jewish sources\*, it was at this tower that specially appointed shepherds would raise sheep and lambs destined for sacrifice in Jerusalem at Passover. These shepherds would use the tower to watch for any enemies, either human or animal, that might attack or hurt the sheep. It was their job to make sure that their flock did not acquire any damage or blemishes that would prevent them from meeting temple requirements for sacrifice.

†This is the oldest traditional placement of the tower, although Jerome places it just south of Bethlehem, coinciding better with the traditional site for the birth of Christ, where the Church of the Nativity stands today. The idea that Jesus was born in a 'cave' came from Origen of Alexandria (185-254 AD), who sited a particular cave over which the Church of the Nativity was built. Unfortunately, Migdal Edar does not exist today, and thus far archaeologists have been unable to unearth its actual whereabouts.

\* The best sources are the following: 1) The 'Mishnah', which is the first recording of the oral law of the Jews. Next to the Scriptures it is the basic textbook for Jewish life and thought, and the major source of rabbinic teachings of Judaism. 2) Alfred Edersheim, "The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, From the Manger in Bethlehem to the baptism in Jordan, The Nativity of Jesus the Messiah", published by Hindrickson Publishers in 1993. 3) "Migdal Eder", by Rabbi Mike L. Short, can be read at [www.mayimhayim.org](http://www.mayimhayim.org) 4) "Where Was the Birth Place of the Lord Jesus?" by Cooper P. Abrams III, can be read at [www.bible-truth.org](http://www.bible-truth.org) 5) "The Bible's Story of the Birth of Jesus" by Steve Rudd, can be read at [www.bible.ca](http://www.bible.ca)

According to Jewish writer Rabbi Mike L. Short, the shepherds customarily kept their flocks outside in the fields 24 hours a day, but ewes ready to give birth were brought back to the tower which held birthing stalls that were kept ceremonially clean. The Hebrew word "fatnay" which translates into 'manger' does not have to mean a feeding trough but can also be translated as 'stall' (see Strong's dictionary translation). Rabbi Short mentions, too, that shepherds would wrap the newborn lambs in 'swaddling cloths' to protect them from injury.

What is interesting about the Luke passage relating the Christmas story is that the angels do not tell the shepherds in the fields where to go and find Christ, other than to look for him 'in a manger, wrapped in swaddling cloths' (Luke 2:8-20). How would the shepherds know where in Bethlehem to look? The first logical place was to go to their own manger, their own birthing stalls.

Rabbi Munk concludes from reading Targum Yonatan (an Aramaic translation of the Hebrew Bible written during Israel's seventy year captivity in Babylon), that Jacob in Genesis 35:23 spread his tent beyond Migdal Edar, *"the place where King Messiah will reveal Himself at the end of days."* (Micah 4:8). Based on the Micah 4:8 passage, it became a common Jewish tradition that the Messiah would be revealed from Migdal Edar, the tower of the flock.

**Continued on next page...**

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## The Tower of Migdal Edar, cont...

What an amazing proposition! That Jesus, the 'Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world' (John 1:29), Himself without blemish or spot (1 Peter 1:19), and our perfect Passover sacrifice (1 Corinthians 5:7), would be born in the very place where all Passover lambs of the day were born, destined to walk the same road as they, and like them destined to be slaughtered as a Passover sacrifice in Jerusalem. The shepherds, marveling at what they saw, were beholding not just their perfect, final Passover Lamb, but their own Good Shepherd, "who gives His life for His sheep" (John 10:11).

It is also fitting that in the first scriptural mention of the tower, Genesis 35:16-21, Rachel gives birth to a son which she names "Benoni", meaning 'son of my sorrow', but Jacob, his father, changes the name to "Benjamin", 'son of my right hand'. Jesus lived his life on earth as 'Benoni', a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief (Isaiah 53:3), whose own mother certainly shared the sorrow of the cross with Him. But now, Jesus has become 'Benjamin', and is seated at the right hand of His Father (Acts 2:33-34; 7:55; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:3,13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2).

Ironically, the scriptures tell us that the Name of our Lord is also our strong tower, where "*the righteous run to Him, and are safe*" (Proverbs 18:10). He was born in Bethlehem, 'the house of bread', to become our Bread of Life. The book of Micah, which speaks of the Messiah coming from both Migdal Edar (Micah 4:8) and Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), also contains a telling passage where the Jews speak to God, saying, "*With what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings?... Or shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my own body for the sin of my soul?*" (Micah 6:6-7). Little did they realize that it would be God Himself who would offer up the sacrifice of His own firstborn to pay for their transgressions.

Christmas, in a way, is experienced best when seen through the eyes of a child. I have friends who have shared with me the memory of the first Christmas where their firstborn child was first old enough to understand a little of what was happening. All the things we take for granted: the tree, the lights, the presents, are all seen with wonder and excitement when viewed through the eyes of a young child. We look at newborn babies sleeping peacefully, and marvel at the miracle of life, at their innocence, at the potential of their unknown future, with hope and with anticipation. It is perhaps in these moments we can relate to the shepherds on that first Christmas, marveling and wondering what the future actually held for them and this baby, and how this Messiah, so small and innocent, would

actually one day save His people. Little did they know!



My prayer for you this Christmas season is that you discover Christ with new eyes and a new light, and that the wonder of the shepherds would be yours to experience personally. May Jesus be born anew in you, and may you never cease to marvel at the perfect way that God has woven history and scripture together to bring about His perfect salvation, in order that you would spend eternity in His presence and love. Blesséd Noel!

## RING THE BELLS!

(sung to the tune of "Jingle Bells")



On a starry night many years ago,  
Stars were shining bright on the earth below:  
Angel voices told of a new-born king,  
While the bells of Bethlehem joyfully did ring.

OH, RING THE BELLS! RING THE BELLS!  
RING THEM OUT TODAY,  
ECHOING THROUGH ALL THE WORLD,  
LISTEN TO WHAT THEY SAY!  
RING THE BELLS! RING THE BELLS!  
RING THEM ALL THE WAY!  
SPREAD THE MESSAGE FAR AND WIDE  
THAT CHRIST IS BORN TODAY!

Wise men from afar journeyed night and day,  
Followed till the star rested where He lay.  
Looking for a king, but a baby saw,  
Stayed to leave their offering, to worship and adore.  
*(repeat chorus)*

Shepherds left their sheep on the mountains wild,  
Paid their homage deep to the Holy Child.  
We may worship, too: gifts before Him lay,  
Let the bells of Heaven ring, for Christ is born today!  
*(repeat chorus)*

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**For creative Christmas service ideas, go to  
[www.salvationist.ca/helps](http://www.salvationist.ca/helps)**

*As we struggle with shopping lists and invitations,  
compounded by December's bad weather,  
it is good to be reminded that there are people in our  
lives who are worth this aggravation,  
and people to whom we are worth the same.*

*- Donald E. Westlake*